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## **American Citizen Services Newsletter March 2005**

In this issue:

- ⇒ **Safety and Security Situation**
- ⇒ **Upcoming Holidays**
- ⇒ **Changes to Fees for Passport Services**
- ⇒ **Passport for Minors**
- ⇒ **Register Your Stay in Macedonia**
- ⇒ **Security Awareness: Tips to Avoid Car Theft and Break-ins**
- ⇒ **Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN)**
- ⇒ **Useful Internet Addresses Available for U.S. Citizens**

### **SAFETY AND SECURITY SITUATION**

While the security situation in Macedonia has stabilized, occasional inter-ethnic and criminal violence remains a concern. The overall number of security incidents has diminished significantly since 2001. Travelers should be alert for unusual behavior and other possible indicators that something out of the ordinary is in progress. Acts of intimidation and violence against American citizens have not occurred recently but remain possible.

Americans should avoid demonstrations and other sites, such as roadblocks, where large crowds are gathered, particularly those involving political causes or striking workers.

While overall levels of crime remain low, there have been several recent incidents of home and vehicle break-ins. We remind all American citizens to lock their windows and doors at all times and not leave any valuables in plain sight in their car.

For the latest security information, Americans traveling abroad should regularly monitor the Department's Internet web site at <http://travel.state.gov> where current [Worldwide Caution Public Announcements](#), [Travel Warnings and Public Announcements](#) can be found.

## UPCOMING HOLIDAYS

The Embassy will be closed for the following holidays in the next six months:

- May Day – Monday, May 2
- Memorial Day – Monday, May 30
- Independence Day – Monday, July 4
- Ilinden Uprising Day-Tuesday, August 2
- American Labor Day – Monday, September 5
- Macedonian Independence Day – Thursday, September 8

A full list of all of our holiday closings for 2005 is available online at <http://skopje.usembassy.gov/holidays/non-working%20days.html>

## CHANGES TO FEES FOR PASSPORT SERVICES

A \$12.00 dollar surcharge is being added to the existing cost of a U.S. passport. The surcharge was authorized by the Consolidated Appropriation Act, 2005, to support enhanced border security. The Department is in the midst of a multi-year effort to increase border security by strengthening the security of the passport adjudication process and the physical passport itself. These changes impose a variety of developmental and operating costs on the Bureau of Consular Affairs.

The surcharge will be used to support the issuance of a newly redesigned passport containing new security features. One of these is the addition of a biometric identifier. A chip will be embedded in the cover and will contain the same information that appears on the data page, including the bearer's picture as the biometric. The new fee will also cover the cost of sending passports by Priority Mail, a security Feature that allows us to better track and account for passports.

Fees for the renewal of an adult passport will rise from \$55 to \$67. Passports for first-time adult applicants (or those who are unable to present their most recently issued passport) go up from \$85 to \$97; and the cost of a passport for a minor under age 16 goes from \$70 to \$82.

Several other consular fees are also going up. Most of them affect applicants for immigrant visas. For Americans applying for immigrant visas ("Green Cards;" IR-1 or CR-1) for their foreign spouses, a new \$45 immigrant visa surcharge applies to all applicants for immigrant visas, including Diversity Visas. The surcharge was included in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2005, to recover costs associated with security enhancements to the IV process. More information is available at <http://skopje.usembassy.gov/Consular/Immigrant%20Visa%20Services/ivs.html>

## PASSPORT FOR MINORS

The Department of State has tightened rules requiring the consent of both parents to obtain a passport for a minor child. In the past, when only one parent has appeared at the Embassy to apply for the minor's passport, we required a written statement of consent from the other parent. **As of November 1, 2004, the State Department requires that such statements be notarized.**

We still strongly prefer that both parents appear. We will, however, accept a statement of consent from the parent who does not appear, as long as it is notarized.

The statement must give the non-appearing parent's unequivocal and unconditional consent to the issuance of the passport, and must be notarized. A statement notarized by a Macedonian notary is acceptable, so long as **the statement is in English**. Alternatively, the notarized statement may be obtained free of charge at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate abroad.

The reason for this change is to provide additional safeguards necessary to prevent child abduction or other interference with the non-applying parent's rights.

The Department of State's Bureau of Consular Affairs' website <http://travel.state.gov> provides additional passport application information, including locations of where to apply, application forms, and information about required citizenship and identification documentation, including parental permission information needed for children under age 14, and much more.

## **REGISTER YOUR STAY IN MACEDONIA**

We encourage all U.S. citizens resident in Macedonia to register with the American Embassy Skopje. Registration can help with renewing a lost or stolen passport, assist with notification in the event of an emergency and provide a record of residency.

Consular Officers will not give out your personal contact information without your express permission, but they can contact you to pass on messages in case of an emergency back home.

The State Department recently launched a secure online travel registration website which will allow you, as an American citizen, to record foreign trip and residence information that the Department of State can use to communicate with you and assist you in case of an emergency.

U.S. citizens around the world who travel or reside abroad can access this site either through a link on <http://travel.state.gov> or directly at <https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs>. We invite you to register yourself and your family and get acquainted with travel registration. If you are already registered with U.S. Embassy Skopje, you may re-register on-line to update your records. Please provide complete information.

The new Internet travel registration service for American citizens allows you to register and update your contact information on the Internet at any time, making it easier for you to keep your information current. The site also provides you with up-to-date travel information customized to your unique travel agenda and itinerary. The data you provide is secured behind Department of State firewalls, accessed only by cleared personnel in Embassies, Consulates, and the Department of State, and releasable only under the provisions of the Privacy Act.

If you are unable to utilize the online registration process, you can register with the Embassy by downloading the [Registration form for Americans in Macedonia](#) and sending it to us by mail, fax or email along with a copy of your U.S. passport.

U.S. citizens who wish to register with the Embassy can also apply in person and bring their US passport. Registration is free.

## **SECURITY AWARENESS: TIPS TO AVOID CAR THEFT AND BREAK-INS**

We have seen a recent increase in vehicle break-ins in Skopje. Please look at the following safety tips. Theft is most often a crime of opportunity – if your car looks easy to break into or steal, thieves will be drawn to it.

Steps:

1. Park your car in an area that is well lit and near lots of people.
2. Keep the windows rolled up and the car locked, even if it's parked at your own house.
3. Never leave any contents or valuables in plain sight. Remove cellular phones, audio systems, computers, packages, sport equipment, cameras, purses, etc. Lock them in the trunk before you park or take them with you. And if you can't replace an item, don't leave it anywhere in your vehicle.
4. Consider buying a visible mechanical locking device to lock the steering wheel (like the Club), and/or an auto theft alarm system.
5. Install locking lug nuts to prevent your custom wheels or externally mounted spare tire from being stolen.
6. Keep in mind when purchasing a new car that some makes and models have a higher incidence of theft than others.
7. Keep your car registration and insurance card with you instead of in the glove compartment so that thieves cannot produce these documents if stopped by the police.
8. Disconnect either the battery or the coil wire from the distributor cap if you have to leave your car unattended for an extended period of time. Car thieves will often not have time or the desire to diagnose why the car won't start.
9. Don't leave spare keys in your vehicle. An experienced thief knows all the hiding places.
10. Park in your garage or off-street parking spot. Don't leave your vehicle on the street. If you have to park on a street, avoid dark or isolated areas.

## **INDIVIDUAL TAXPAYER IDENTIFICATION NUMBER (ITIN)**

Social Security Numbers are only available to American Citizens and Legal Permanent Residents (LPRs, or "Green Card" holders). They are not issued to spouses of American Citizens who are not LPRs or Macedonian students going to the U.S. for college.

Instead, the Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN), a nine-digit number that begins with 9, was created for use as a tax reporting number for those taxpayers who do not qualify for Social Security Numbers. ITINs are for tax purposes only. The numbers are not valid as personal identification, and do not imply or in any way provide legal status in the U.S. or entitle holders to work in the U.S.

All new ITIN applicants should use the December 2003 revision of the Form W-7, Application for IRS Individual Taxpayer Identification Number, available at <http://irs.gov>.

Each applicant will have to show a federal tax purpose for seeking an ITIN, either by attaching a federal tax return to Form W-7 or providing documents that support an exception to the requirement to file a return. Exceptions are listed in the Form W-7 instructions. ITIN applications without proof of need for tax administration purposes will be rejected.

The IRS is streamlining the number of documents accepted as proof of identity to obtain an ITIN. The acceptable documents are listed in the Form W-7 instructions, and at <http://www.irs.gov>, Keyword: ITIN.

People needing certified copies of their passport for ITIN purposes can obtain those copies at the Embassy as a notarial service. The cost is \$30.00.

#### USEFUL INTERNET ADDRESSES AVAILABLE FOR U.S. CITIZENS

The U.S. Embassy in Skopje	<a href="http://skopje.usembassy.gov">http://skopje.usembassy.gov</a>
U.S. Federal Government:	<a href="http://www.firstgov.gov">http://www.firstgov.gov</a>
U.S. State Department- Bureau of Consular Affairs:	<a href="http://travel.state.gov">http://travel.state.gov</a>
U.S. Department of Homeland Security:	<a href="http://www.dhs.gov">http://www.dhs.gov</a>
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services	<a href="http://www.uscis.gov">www.uscis.gov</a>
U.S. Federal Aviation Administration:	<a href="http://www.faa.gov">http://www.faa.gov</a>
U.S. Internal Revenue Service:	<a href="http://www.irs.gov">http://www.irs.gov</a>
Social Security Administration:	<a href="http://www.ssa.gov">http://www.ssa.gov</a>
SSA Newsletter:	<a href="http://www.ssa.gov/enews/">http://www.ssa.gov/enews/</a>
Federal Voting Assistance:	<a href="http://www.fvap.gov">http://www.fvap.gov</a>
U.S. Customs & Border Protection:	<a href="http://www.cbp.gov">http://www.cbp.gov</a> (for information including importation of household pets, animal and plant health inspection, etc)
U.S. Department of Agriculture:	<a href="http://www.usda.gov">http://www.usda.gov</a> (for information on food products, food safety and inspection service)
Internet Fraud Complaint Center:	<a href="http://www.ifccfbi.gov">http://www.ifccfbi.gov</a>



This newsletter is an unofficial and informal source of practical information for American citizens residing in Macedonia. If you have comments, questions or suggestions, please contact the Consular Section at (02) 311-6180, xt. 3179 or at [consularskopje@state.gov](mailto:consularskopje@state.gov). This and all future newsletters will also be available on the ACS page of our Internet site at <http://skopje.usembassy.gov>